

# MADISON COUNTY COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT

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*"Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it whether it exists or not, diagnosing it incorrectly, and applying the wrong remedy."*

## A Year of Activity in the Communication Department

This past year has brought a variety of activity and some important changes in the Communication Department.

With a lot of assistance from Dispatch Supervisor Janet Fortner and every dispatcher - and much input and direction from Sheriff Schenk, the Sheriff's Office, Info Systems and DES, there have been a number of important changes and new acquisitions involving the Communication Department.

The following are highlights of some of the more significant projects and purchases:

The advertising, hiring and full time training commitment for 3 newly hired dispatchers (Communication Officers).

The completion of a Policy and Procedure Manual specifically for the Communication Center and Communication Officers.

The development of a Training Task Book for training and record documentation of training subjects and training duration.

Implementation of a "Trigger Point Staffing Policy" so additional dispatchers can be called in immediately during significant county operations.

The joint purchase of a Command and Communication Trailer for responses to emergency incidents, or long term Command needs of county responders.

Award of a \$35,000 grant for additional Motorola radios and equipment.

The installation of 4 brand new UHF base station radios to modernize, update and create radio redundancy and reliability with our Courthouse to VC Hill communication connection. This purchase was necessitated because

the radios that were replaced were very outdated and in need of costly rebuilding - and replacement parts were nearly impossible to find.

Implementation of the **Emergency Notification Service** (aka reverse 911) in dispatch. This service will help facilitate immediate contact with the public for emergency alerts and other very important notifications in all parts of the county.

Installation of a Satellite Television System and TV monitor for local / national emergency information and weather alerts in the EOC and Communication Center.

Printing and emailing of a regularly distributed Communication Newsletter for informational awareness throughout the first responder and local government employee community.

We developed the **MADISON COUNTY EMERGENCY INFORMATION** Web-Site that is updated daily at a minimum - or more often as necessary. The site is intended to allow instant access to updated emergency information and county related weather information, road conditions and significant public notices. The site is located on the internet at: **madison.homestead.com**

The widespread distribution of mobile and portable radios to road crews and other responder personnel for better communications from vehicles and road equipment.

Continued regular involvement in the South Central Montana Interoperability Consortia (SCMIC) and Interoperability Montana - for the development of two new radio repeater sites in Madison County. (over \$800,000 in communication grant funding - scheduled for the Spring of 2009.)

Continued on page two -

The purchase and installation of a paging system for DES personnel and the Supervisor in dispatch. Additional pagers will be issued at a later time to others as deemed necessary.

A probationary dispatcher training process that includes, improved record keeping, a rotation of on duty instructors and "hands on" mentorship training on all shifts during the initial 6 week training period.

Development of an all hazard, locally staffed and county deployed, Incident Management Team - for rapid responses to major incidents.

Purchase of a \$12,000 multi-channel telephone and radio communication recording device in the dispatch office.

Purchase of a portable microwave unit so dispatchers can warm their food and beverages without leaving the radio console or telephones.

We altered the dispatch schedule - placing the full time dispatchers on a Monday through Friday shift schedule and delegating part time positions specifically for the weekend shifts.

This schedule allows for an occasional overtime opportunities on the weekends for full time dispatchers - and extra shifts during the week for part time employees.

Additionally, we have been involved with the coordination, training and attendance of a variety of exercises and county meetings including: Emergency Operations Center training for all county employees, an After Action Review of the Hebgen Incident, participation in the April 08 Sheridan Training Burn, Creating a Positive Workplace seminar, meetings and participation in the Anthrax info sessions with Gallatin County, Incident Command Recertification Classes (ICS 300 and 400, Public Information Officer, Incident Liaison Officer etc) - Madison County Fire Chief meetings, monthly LEPC meetings, First Responder Size-up and Radio Use classes, monthly SCMIC meetings, quarterly Communication Officer Meetings, monthly IMTC meetings and more.

The design and ordering of materials for the remodeling of the dispatch office is currently "in process".

This action was initiated in mid September and the countertops for the Communication Center are being built at this time. Changes are coming soon.

The entire dispatch office is being reorganized with the goal being: two identical dispatch stations that are exact duplicates of each other. A third additional "supervisor station" that has computer and telephone capabilities and can perform supplemental dispatch duties for a third Comm Officer during significant county emergencies.

We have purchased a 2000 watt Honda generator and put together a dispatch console with two identically programmed, 100 watt radios in the Command Trailer.

This coming year appears to be equally busy with several "in the works" projects extending through 2009.

We have been involved with Interoperable Montana and SCMIC for the better part of 4 years. There have been many hopes and expectations associated with this project - and we also have to acknowledge that there have been a few disappointments as well.

I know it has been said before, but we are so very close to reaping the benefits of the IM grants and getting not just one, but two top of the line, first rate repeater towers.

We have been assured by several different sources that the Sierra site (Ruby Mountains) and VC Pass have been funded and are expected to be started as soon as the (coming) snow melts in the Spring. Currently both sites are in the environmental evaluation process and are part of the "Southwest Loop" - connecting Madison County and Beaverhead county with the rest of the state.

The two new repeaters will be add considerable capabilities to our radio site plan and we hope to make the Virginia City Pass location, the "backbone" of our radio repeater system.

We are also proceeding with the development of a "reverse ride along" program - where county first responders have the option of spending time in the dispatch office to observe E911 duties and procedures. - and observe first hand, the requirements and challenges of working in the Communication Center.

There is a lot of work ahead and 2009 appears to be a promising year in terms of communication infrastructure improvements for Madison County.